

Message Text

SECRET

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15

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TAGS: MASS, YE, USSR, SA

SUBJECT: MORE SOVIET EQUIPMENT?

1. SUMMARY: ONCE MORE REPORTS ARE CIRCULATING THAT ADDITIONAL SOVIET EQUIPMENT, OVER AND ABOVE T-34 AND MIG-17 REPLACEMENTS, MAY BE EN ROUTE TO YEMEN. EQUIPMENT ALLEGEDLY INCLUDES FIGHTER AIRCRAFT, TANKS, AND SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILES. APPEARS FROM HERE THAT SAUDIS KNOW OF AND MAY HAVE ACQUIESCED IN THIS TRANSACTION AS A MEANS OF TIDING OVER YEMEN ARMED FORCES UNTIL MORE WESTERN EQUIPMENT CAN ARRIVE.

2. BOTH DURING FAREWELL CALL BY PREVIOUS DATT AND INITIAL CALL BY NEW DATT, YEMENI CHIEF OF STAFF LT COL AHMED AL-GHASMI DESCRIBED AS HE HAS SO MANY TIMES IN THE PAST HIS DILEMA OVER FINDING A SUITABLE SOURCE OF ARMS FOR HIS MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT. WHILE REITERATING HIS DESIRE TO CUT SOVIET CONNECTION AND LOOK

WESTWARD, HE MAINTAINED HIS SKEPTICISM OVER SAUDI WILLINGNESS OR ABILITY TO PROVIDE THE MEANS OF EQUIPPING THE YEMENI ARMED FORCES WITH WESTERN HARDWARE IN A REASONABLE TIME FRAME. HE THEN WENT ON TO SAY THAT AT THIS VERY MOMENT THREE SOVIET SHIPS BEARING MIG-21 AIRCRAFT, "ASSORTED" TANKS, AND SA-2, SA-3, AND SA-7 MISSILES WERE EN ROUTE TO YEMEN. HE SAID THE FIRST SHIP WAS DUE IN HODEIDA DURING THE LAST FEW DAYS

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OF JANUARY. WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF SUCH DELIVERIES ON SAG, HE OPINED THAT THE SAUDIS ALREADY KNEW OF THIS TRANSACTION, EXPRESSED THE FERVENT HOPE THAT IT WOULD NOT PREJUDICE THE LONG AWAITED SAUDI ASSISTANCE AND CONCLUDED RHETORICALLY WITH "WHAT ELSE COULD WE DO?"

3. DATT SUBSEQUENTLY CHECKED WITH THE SAUDI MILITARY ATTACHE, COL SALIH HUDAYAN, WHO HAD ESSENTIALLY THE SAME INFORMATION. HUDAYAN SEEMED RELATIVELY RELAXED ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF MORE AND NEWER SOVIET EQUIPMENT IN YEMEN, (HE SPECIFICALLY DISCUSSED MIG-21'S) BUT USED THE REPORT AS A BACKDROP FOR A LONG, ENTHUSIASTIC PLEA FOR EARLY DELIVERIES OF US EQUIPMENT TO YEMEN TO COUNTER THE IMPACT OF FURTHER SOVIET DELIVERIES. HE MENTIONED THAT COLONEL DHAHRI IS EXPECTED IN YEMEN LATER THIS MONTH, AND, WHEN INFORMED OF THE SCHEDULED US-SAUDI MEETING IN RIYADH, SUGGESTED THAT IT WOULD BE MOST BENEFICIAL IF THE US TEAM COULD ACCOMPANY COLONEL DHAHRI TO YEMEN ARRIVING IF POSSIBLE BEFORE THE FIRST SOVIET SHIP. HE FELT THAT SUCH A VISIBLE GESTURE OF US INTEREST WOULD HELP NEUTRALIZE THE PROPONENTS OF CONTINUED SOVIET AID WITHIN THE YEMEN ARMED FORCES.

4. IN RELATED DEVELOPMENT, AMBASSADOR INFORMED BY FRENCH COLLEAGUE THAT THE SAUDI AMBASSADOR NOT ONLY STATED THAT SAG IS AWARE OF THE PROPOSED SOVIET SHIPMENTS BUT WENT ON TO SAY THAT RIYADH HAD INTERPOSED NO RPT NO OBJECTION TO THE TRANSACTION.

5. COMMENT: (A) THE ENTIRE PERFORMANCE COULD BE DISCOUNTED AS AN ORCHESTRATED ATTEMPT TO PRESSURE USG INTO EXPEDITED DELIVERIES OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT. WE BELIEVE HOWEVER, THAT A MORE LIKELY INTERPRETATION INVOLVES SAUDI ACQUIESCENCE ORPS A LIMITED SOVIET RESUPPLY EFFORT TO TIDE OVER THE YEMENI ARMED FORCES UNTIL THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A VIABLE MECHANISM FOR EQUIPPING YEMEN WITH WESTERN MILITARY HARSWARD. CERTAINLY, THE RELATIVE UNCONCERN SHOWN BY SAUDI REPS IN YEMEN IS NOTEWORTHY AND STANDS IN SHARP CONTRAST TO THEIR ATTITUDES LAST NOVEMBER, ALTHOUGH SAUDI ATTACHE DID EXPRESS FEARS OVER THE LONG-RANGE CONSEQUENCES OF CONTINUED SOVIET ASSISTANCE. WOULD APPRECIATE ANY INSIGHTS EMBASSY JIDDA
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CAN OFFER.

(B) EMBASSY HAS NO OBJECTION TO VISIT BY FIFER AND PLUMMER AFTER CONCLUSION OF RIYADH MEETINGS. SINCE THEY WILL PRESUMABLY NOT BE IN A POSITION, HOWEVER, TO OFFER ANY SIGNIFICANT COMMITMENTS AT THAT TIME, IT MAY BE PREFERABLE FOR DATT TO PROVIDE AN INTERIM REPORT IN LIEU OF FOLLOW-UP VISIT PROPOSED BY SAUDI MILITARY ATTACHE.

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